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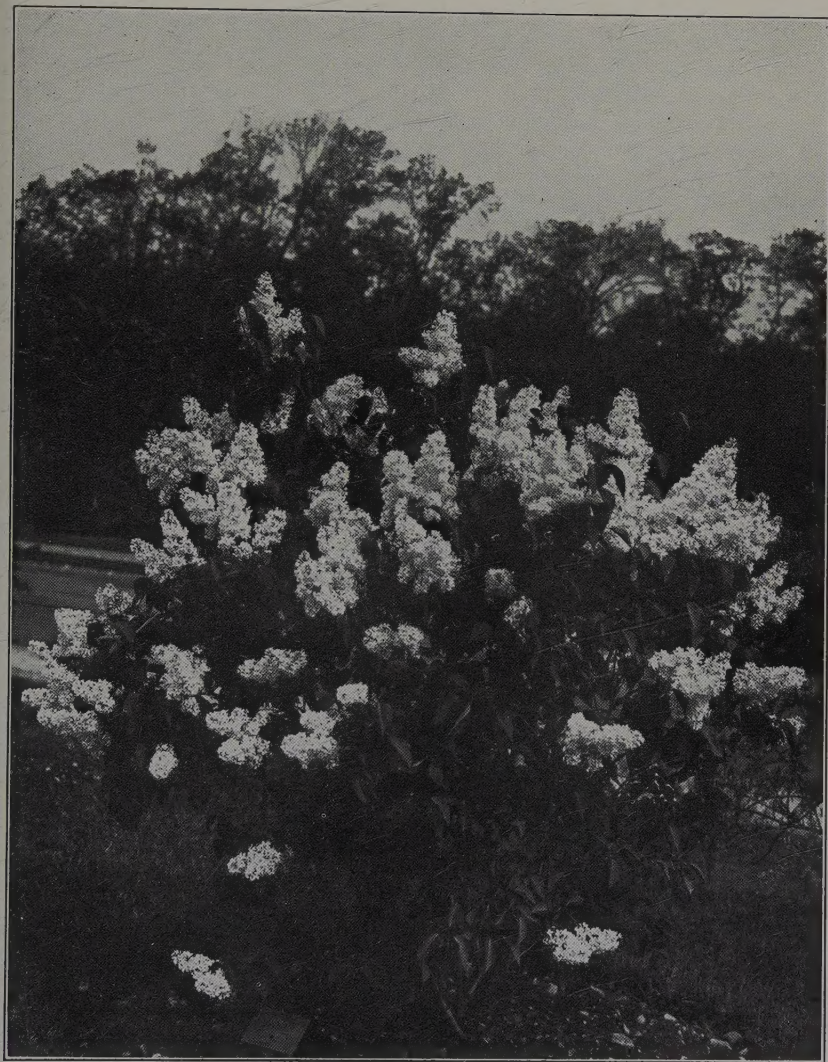
NO. 8

Syringa vulgaris, the Common Lilac, is the most popular hardy flowering shrub and the plant most strongly entrenched in the affections of New England people. In all probability it was one of the first exotic plants introduced into this country but just when and where this took place is unknown. This must have been soon after the first settlers came to New England for it is a feature around old houses on Cape Cod, around Newburyport, and other long established towns and villages. Having withstood the vicissitudes of time, the Lilac is in many places the only sign that marks the sites of old homesteads. It appears to have been first cultivated in Constantinople and from there to have reached Vienna about 1563. Later its cultivation spread through western Europe. Its native habitat is the mountains of Bulgaria and other parts of the Balkan Peninsula, but this fact was not known until some three centuries after it had been brought into general cultivation. Plants of the wild type may be seen growing in the Arboretum collection. They have narrow clusters of dull purplish and by no means attractive flowers. It is evident that the Common Lilac of gardens was a form selected we know not when. Luxuriant in growth, abundant of blossom and rich in fragrance, the long cultivated form is not surpassed in these virtues by any of its numerous offspring.

Cultivation. The Common Lilac is one of the most accommodating shrubs, thrives in all sorts of queer places and often under adverse conditions. However, it appreciates proper attention to site and soil and its modern progeny demand it. A slope where the roots can enjoy good drainage and the branches be fully exposed to sun and air is the proper place to plant Lilacs. The soil should be a good strong loam and if lime be present so much the better. Indeed, if this be lacking, it must be supplied from time to time either in the form of field lime or, better still, in that of bone-meal. The Lilac is a gross feeder and to give of its best demands a liberal supply of food, farmyard manure, especially cow-dung, being the best allround fertilizer. In such soil and under such conditions the Common Lilac

and its very numerous progeny will flourish in the colder parts of this country and in lower Canada. It is essentially a plant for cold climates. In districts where the seasons are warmer than those of New England the Lilac is apt to suffer from mildew during the summer months and in the warmer states, like Florida and California, it is of little value. Its requirements are comparatively few. No pruning other than that required to keep the bushes shapely is necessary, but it should be remembered that no matter when pruning be done it means loss of flower for one season. If the bushes, through some cause or another, have become decrepit and unsightly, they may be rejuvenated by cutting down to the ground. It is surprising how good-natured Lilacs really are. They have this peculiarity, however, that they start into growth from the tops of the cut branches and the young shoots are very easily broken off by the wind. It is therefore advisable to cut them as near to the ground as is practicable. The work should be done in late March or early April in order that the plants may have the benefit of a full season in which to make new growth. When such drastic treatment is necessary the plants should be cultivated around and given a supply of fertilizer including lime or bone-meal. In June when the new growth is at its height nitrate of soda, sparingly applied to the outermost feeding roots, which are some 2 to 3 feet from the center of the plant, will be found beneficial. It is well to apply this nitrate on rainy days, about three dressings at intervals of ten days being ample. The collection of Lilacs in the Arboretum is a good illustration of the result of severe pruning followed by liberal cultivation and feeding. In the early spring of 1927 it was decided to prune the bushes severely. After this was done they were given the treatment mentioned above and during the season made new growths of from 2 to 7 feet, which this year are carrying a goodly number of extra large flower clusters. Following such pruning the weaker shoots should be removed the succeeding winter.

Propagation. Authorities agree that Lilacs should be on their own roots but the means of propagation best suited to attain this are disputed. The Common Lilac suckers very freely and on this account, except for standards, is worthless as an understock on which to graft or bud the modern sorts. By nurserymen different species of Privet are now generally used as understocks. The claim is that the Lilac is most easily propagated by this manner, that it grows rapidly and in the course of time develops its own root-system from the point where the scion is inserted. All emphasize that in time Lilacs budded or grafted on the Privet and planted deep develop their own root-system, but none say when, and in fairness to their customers they should not sell such plants until this happy state of affairs has become accomplished. That Lilacs budded or grafted low on Privet make bushy, saleable plants in one or two years, is fact, but that they make satisfactory garden plants is open to grave question. The Lilac grows faster than the Privet understock as anyone who examines a plant so grafted will see. If the thumb be taken as the size of the Lilac stem, the little finger will denote the relative thickness



A good white French Lilac, Vestale.

of the Privet understock. The root-system of the Privet understock is insufficient to supply the Lilac plant with the amount of water and food-salts necessary for its well-being and the result is, that the foliage on such grafted bushes is usually small and malformed until they develop their own root-system. From the point of view of those who want healthy plants that will grow freely from the date of planting there are only two ways of propagating Lilacs. One is by layering and the other by cuttings. Layering is a simple method of increasing not only Lilacs but nearly every other kind of shrub and small tree and a method much too infrequently practised. It consists of nothing more than notching or by other means rupturing the shoot, bending it down and covering the fracture with earth. Cuttings of moderately firm wood taken in mid-summer or soon afterwards according to locality root easily. In the Arboretum such cuttings are taken during the last days of June and the first of July. The leafy shoots are cut each from 3 to 4 inches long, with a piece of old wood, known technically as a heel, and are inserted in sand in a closed frame where they enjoy the benefit of bottom heat. Under such conditions they root in about a month. Afterwards they are moved into flats and the following spring planted out in the nursery grounds. From the start such plants are provided with their own root-system which is always sufficient to nourish the foliage and in three to four years they become nice bushy plants. Hardwood cuttings inserted in the ordinary sandpit of the propagating house in winter will root but much more slowly, often taking six months. It is admitted that Lilacs propagated from cuttings take longer to develop into saleable plants but in four or five years they overtake and soon outdistance those that have been budded or grafted on Privet.

French Lilacs, so-called because most of them have been raised in France, are the result of intercrossing and selection among the different forms of the Common Lilac. In size of inflorescence and of individual flower they far excel the parent stock but only a few retain the rich fragrance. The variety is very great and in the Arboretum collection nearly two hundred sorts may be seen. One of the most frequent inquiries is for a list of the best Lilacs. The compilation of any such list must be largely a matter of individual tastes, but the following twenty-five are entitled to high rank:

SINGLE VARIETIES: WHITE, Madame Florent Stepman, Princess Alexandria, Vestale, Mont Blanc; PALE, Lucie Baltet, Macro-stachya; MEDIUM, Christophe Colomb, Madame F. Morel; DARK, Congo, Marceau, Edmond Boissier, Monge, Réaumur, Turenne.

DOUBLE VARIETIES: WHITE, Edith Cavell, Madame Casimir Périer, Princesse Clementine; PALE, Léon Gambetta; MEDIUM, Duc de Massa, Olivier de Serres, René Jarry-Desloges, Thunberg; DARK, Paul Thirion, Violetta Georges Bellair.

The Lilac collection is easily reached from Forest Hills Gate or the Centre Street Gate.

E. H. W.